

PLAYGROUND ACTIVITIES OF THE
BLIND

Alta Reed

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Playground Activities of the

Blind

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equipment used-
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1923
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not attend school, at an early
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OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK

IN SENATE

WEDNESDAY

MARCH 1917

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Chapter I A Brief History of the Blind

If you want to know what a child is you should study his play, if you want to effect what he is to be, direct the form of play," says Joseph Lee, * and, judging from what one is able to glean by picture or pen of the play activities of the blind before the close of the eighteenth century not many understood children, at least not blind children for history seems to show that their lives were most miserable, that they suffered all kinds of neglect and cruelty and were forced to earn a precarious living by begging on the street, often for the benefit of others.

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Chapter I
A Brief History of the Blind

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* "Play in Education," Joseph Lee.

Dating as far back as the fourth century and up to the eighteenth one hears of various home and refuges for the blind in Europe but no mention seems to have been made of the care given to the blind children.

Interest in children seems to have started when a blind beggar was taken from the streets of Paris and taught to read by means of large raised letters. Thus in 1784 we hear of the first "so called" school for the blind."

Interest in the deaf resulted in the opening of a school for them in 1817 but at that time no special interest seems to have been shown for the blind. Some of the states had a census of their blind, such as New Hampshire, (1819) Pennsylvania, and Vermont

followed a little later by Connecticut and Massachusetts: but not until interesting reports began to reach America of the successful operation of the schools for the blind in Europe did the real interest awaken.

Dr. John D. Fisher returned to Boston from studying in Paris and reported the success of Valentine Haüy's school. Then agitation was the great discussion in 1827 about redoubled in Massachusetts and the care of the blind children resulted in the starting of our first school for the blind in 1829 under the guidance of that fiery leader, Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe.

Since then, according to the United States bureau of Education (1918) seventy-one schools for the blind have been started throughout the United States. This list probably does not include the various religious institutions for the blind found in many of our large cities.

With the many schools for the blind now recorded it would seem as though the playground activities of the blind would be easily and successfully reported. However a study of available statistics* shows that in 1910 the number of blind of school age attending school was only 4323 out of 5445 and that the number ranged from Montana

* The Blind--Harry Best

reporting nearly 100% attendance to Illinois with 63%, to New York reporting about 50% attendance, down to Tennessee with a report of only 20% in school.

This sad state of affairs is not however entirely the fault of the schools for in some states there is always a waiting list, then, too, through apparently no fault of their own, the parents often do not even know what arrangements to make to have their child admitted to a school, and not a few parents either conceal the fact of the child's blindness or are afraid to part with the child for so long a time as is often necessary. Possibly the remedy may lie in a stricter enforcement of the compulsory education law in all instead of a few of the states.

The Institution of what are known as field officers whose work is the searching out of blind children in the various communities as well as to give a happy impression of the school home will no doubt lead to a better report at a later date. According to the report of the Society for the Prevention of Blindness, blindness among children is decreasing--a most cheering report. This society has, by means of literature, posters, moving pictures and lectures done much in many helpful ways to aid in the prevention of blindness.

To quote Dr. Harry Best* as to the prevention of blindness- "Provided that we had sufficient medical knowledge and sufficient control over sanitary conditions, the answer might be said to be - nearly all of it."

Someone has defined a blind person as one not having over one tenth normal vision; but the term "Blind" as used in this paper will include those who were born blind, those who were born with very little vision, those who have become blind through disease or accident as well as those who by lack of vision are unable to do the work in the public schools for the sighted and should be in one of the "Conversation of Vision" classes.

* The Blind--Harry Best.

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This paper does not consider the question of the blind who are feeble minded for as yet the question of the care to say nothing of their mode of playing is still being much debated. So far as can be learned the home or institutions for such are confined to the eastern part of our country and the question of suitable recreation for them seems to be an entirely different problem.

Chapter II

The Playground Movement.

Dr. Gulick* states that- play has a greater shaping power over the character and nature of man than has any one other activity. A man shows what he really is when he is free to do what he chooses. That as a free expression of self, as the pursuit of an ideal, play has direct bearing on the intimate questions of reality and worth.

And Dr. Simpson* of the North Carolina School for the Blind and Deaf reports thus- As a rule physically less vigorous than the sighted the blind are yet subject, in almost every case go a heavier drain on their vitality.

*A Philosophy of Play-Luter H. Gulick, M.D.

*Report of the American Association of
Instructors for the Blind. (1908)

THE HISTORY

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that is to say to obtain a given result they must put forth greater effort and expend more vital energy than their better equipped competitors. (Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe estimated that the Blind had 25% less energy than the sighted)

The truth of such a statement as Dr. Gulick's has been realized for only a comparatively short time but workers among the blind have felt the truth (without voicing) of Mr. Simpson's ideas for a long time.

It seems strange that not until the blind became numerous should the problem of their care force itself on the public mind. Even then there

were not a few people who feared that most of the blind would always need much oversight and that only a small percent of them could be educated. The education to take chiefly the form of hand work or occasionally music.

But fortunately for the blind their cause was and still is in the hands of men who throw themselves with zest and energy into the new work. Among them being Valentine Haug in France, Dr. Fisher and Dr. Howe in Massachusetts, Dr. Josh D. Russ in New York and Dr. Julius Friedlander in Pennsylvania, and should the list of names be carried on to our own time there would be

counted a goodly number of names.

The schools were not wholly supported by the state and the children were often taken from city to city to exhibit both class (mental) and handwork, in order to earn more money to carry on the new work. Of course the question of proper support for the schools for the blind has long been settled.

The first schools had very little playground room and the chief amusement was walking up and down the halls and piazzas or (and this woeful habit some of the blind of today are slow to give up) what was worse, sinking into some dark corner where idle fingers and minds were soon unhappily occupied.

Music was considered to be the chief occupation for the blind and in the beginning when only a few years at the most were allowed each child for attending school, those who were not musical got a very little beyond the regular class room work. However the schools were in the hands of keen thinking men who soon saw that a more complete training was needed, one of many angles to fit the very different types of mind. They saw also the need of a special training for the very young blind children and so in 1887 we hear of the first kindergarten being started in Boston under the guidance of that very great and true friend of the blind M. Anagnos.

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Since the founding of the first kindergarten for the blind, other schools have begun the same kind of work and thus the blind child of today of kindergarten age (from three to ten years) may have a happy childhood.

They no longer sit listlessly rocking their restless little bodies to and fro, while pushing their fingers into eyes and mouth or twiddling them before their eyes if they can but see a ray of light, but like their seeing brother they can play with many of the kindergarten gifts, do all kinds of pretty weaving and paper folding, learn to know the animals on a miniature form, or the inmates of an aquarium, and have a chance to examine to their heart's content the

different animals loaned to the school, or better, owned by the school.

Of course they are happy and when the bell rings for them to go to the playground they are still eager for fun. There in a good yard the hesitant step changes to a vigorous run. They climb all over the object which needs to be investigated, take a try on the giant swing, use the merry-go-round or become acquainted with a new and delightful addition to their yard, the "junglegy" an affair resembling the metal frame work of a building. The sand pile always has an interest for many of the children. Sometimes they play "Puppy

bone." In this game the "puppy" sits back to the rest of the players while the "bone" (some small object) is placed a foot or more away from him. Someone tries to come and steal it, if the "puppy" hears a sound he says "bow-wow".

He is the puppy till someone gets the bone without his knowledge. Then he becomes one of the players and the successful "thief" the "puppy."

"Cat and Rat" is a game for only the most energetic for it is a circle game played with one child representing the "cat" who stays outside of the ring, and another child representing the "rat" who stays within the ring. Of course

the "cat" tries to catch the "rat" and it takes strong hands to prevent the "cat" from breaking through the ring to catch the rat. This game produces much merriment.

Many of the children use the rocking boat where they sing their school songs as they rock.

Always their friend, the teacher, is near to keep affairs running smoothly, he must sometimes see to it that each child has his share of fun on the see-saw and that each may have his turn on the low stilts or available yard apparatus.

It is a bit of happiness to be long remembered when one is able to

persuade Johnny to run alone, to see the fear fade from his little face and the look of relieved surprise come when he does not fall and then to hear the jolly hearty laugh when he hurls himself like a small avalanche upon the teacher who has guided him by whistling or the clapping of hands. One may even place a child some distance away and back to you and still be found. A few gentle bumps and knocks help him to learn to withstand the harder ones which he is sure to get from his playmates.

Playing horse is much fun if one has a little sight but it is much more exciting to be a train. (Stuart and Michael are both sure that they will be engineers, have no accidents and always be on time). They are two little lads of very little vision who have both made an astonishing improvement. In Stuart's case an almost unbelievable one) or an automobile or pretend to fly or swim.

As the weather grows colder the ring games naturally grow more popular. When the snow comes there is always the snow man to make or the snow fort with its challenge for a good snowball fight, and if by chance there is a patch of ice

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long enough for a good run they can hardly wait for a good slide on their feet and do not stop because of bumps.

Those with little or no vision often play ball sitting down with their feet spread wide apart and roll the ball back and forth.

Of course there is always some apparatus to be put away and even the smallest can help do that.

The little cheeks are red and the voices merry when they plan for the next day's sport and the bell rings all too soon for them to come in doors.

Government* statistics place 9% of the blind children of school age in the kindergarten.

*Government Bulletin 1917-1918

"Schools for the Blind."

Not all of the blind children of kindergarten age are included in that 9% and are not as happy, for among some of the poor and ignorant families nothing is done to develop the activities of the child. They may be left entirely alone or to the care of a younger child and there is nothing to attract his attention, he all too readily does sit still and thus develops many queer little habits, some of which, wrong as they may be, he is never able to overcome.

They are not always loved and are sometimes even abused.

The effect of the lack of love and care is shown in the following cases.

Mable came to us from a home where she was neither wanted nor loved and though she was in her teens she could neither read nor spell the simplest words, and in the time she was with us was never able to learn to do either. She was shy and awkward but in two years surrounded by love, friends and kindly help

The following is a list of the names of the persons who have been admitted to the office of the Secretary of the Board of Education, since the last meeting of the Board, on the 1st of January, 1880. The names are given in alphabetical order, and are followed by the date of admission, and the name of the person who recommended them.

1. Mr. J. H. Smith, admitted on the 1st of January, 1880, recommended by Mr. J. H. Smith.

2. Mr. J. H. Smith, admitted on the 1st of January, 1880, recommended by Mr. J. H. Smith.

3. Mr. J. H. Smith, admitted on the 1st of January, 1880, recommended by Mr. J. H. Smith.

4. Mr. J. H. Smith, admitted on the 1st of January, 1880, recommended by Mr. J. H. Smith.

5. Mr. J. H. Smith, admitted on the 1st of January, 1880, recommended by Mr. J. H. Smith.

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7. Mr. J. H. Smith, admitted on the 1st of January, 1880, recommended by Mr. J. H. Smith.

8. Mr. J. H. Smith, admitted on the 1st of January, 1880, recommended by Mr. J. H. Smith.

9. Mr. J. H. Smith, admitted on the 1st of January, 1880, recommended by Mr. J. H. Smith.

10. Mr. J. H. Smith, admitted on the 1st of January, 1880, recommended by Mr. J. H. Smith.

she learned to do really wonderful work in weaving, basketry and sewing. When she returned to her people able to earn they no longer mistreated her, though they had long ago taken from her the right to become a happy capable and well developed child.

Bill's home was a very ignorant but apparently kind one. When his father was persuaded to let Bill come to us he was so old that his poor blunt fingers refused to do any but the easiest handwork though he tried very hard. He grew interested in athletics and by his strength won an honor for the school to his and our great joy. He must always have tried to do, even as a little boy, for his influence over the boys was always good.

Little Wendell has been so shielded, though not taught, that his mind seems to be affected. He is unable to grasp even the simplest facts and bids fair to become a nervous wreck.

Frail little Albert was never taught to play at home and though his tiny fingers fly across the page as he reads rapidly and well, he has no playmates on the playground (though indoors he delights them with his reading) being afraid to be touched. He loves to sit on the step with his chin in his hands. He shows no sense of direction whatever; apparently never giving it a thought. Though he seems well he just will not play. Some of the parents are frankly glad to be rid of the children, while others are afraid to send them to school at all; and so the small child, who needs the help and exhilaration gained by being with other children in healthy and active play and the feeling of assurance that comes by doing for himself, is forced to become not a useful but a useless

member of his family.

In the words of Mr. John Gregory*

P.38

The nature of the child demands
play and unless good wholesome play is
provided the child becomes lazy, stupid,
morbid and discontented.

"By nature's laws, immutable and just,
Enjoyment stops where indolence

begins;

And purposeless, tomorrow borrowing

sloth,

Itself heaps on its shoulder loads

of woe,

Too heavy to be borne."

* "Outlook" for the Blind," July, 1907.

Chapter III

Results of Playgrounds for Blind.

One of the prominent instructors* P.70
for the blind says that "the blind
child unless taught to expand its
energies in a way that will be
beneficial will sit and become so self
satisfied with its existence that to
exert itself for any cause whatever is
a punishment. Instead if they could be
tempted to feel the pleasure of play as
an outlet for their energy and that to do
such things made them more like other
children we would then begin to notice
that this means of growth and training
placed them in a position where they

*Report of Am. Association of Instructors
of the Blind. Page 70 (1910)

would forget their affliction and would feel the same social relation to their mates as normal children do. This conscious contact with the world about them, as to what children can and ought to be doing in childhood days, would only open the pages of many books, which to them must always remain sealed. Then, too the understanding would be enlightened, it would exert an influence upon their personal life and character, and broaden their faith in things which to them have only a name. Most all play, it matters not of what nature that is good for the seeing, is applicable to the blind if properly directed.

As stated before the vitality of the blind is below that of the seeing. If play grounds are necessary for the development of the seeing how much more important must they be for the development of the blind to help them overcome their fear, awkwardness and helplessness---and where better can they do this than in the gymnasiums or on the playgrounds with their fellows. There they may get a new view point of the principles of right and wrong and thus may choose a path toward a finer character influenced as they are by those about them.

The blind usually respond to every avenue open to them and unless their play is carefully taught and directed it must be limited to what their imagination can picture for them.

The schools for the blind generally show about 81% of the children in the grades 5 to

The following is a list of the names of the persons who have been admitted to the membership of the Society since the last meeting. The names are arranged in alphabetical order of the surnames.

Mr. J. H. Smith
Mr. W. E. Jones
Mr. R. L. Brown
Mr. T. M. Green
Mr. A. D. White
Mr. C. F. Black
Mr. G. H. Grey
Mr. K. L. Gold
Mr. M. N. Silver
Mr. P. Q. Bronze
Mr. S. R. Iron
Mr. U. V. Steel
Mr. X. Y. Copper
Mr. Z. A. Lead
Mr. B. C. Tin
Mr. D. E. Zinc
Mr. F. G. Nickel
Mr. H. I. Cobalt
Mr. J. K. Manganese
Mr. L. M. Magnesium
Mr. N. O. Calcium
Mr. P. R. Sodium
Mr. Q. S. Potassium
Mr. T. U. Barium
Mr. V. W. Strontium
Mr. X. Y. Bismuth
Mr. Z. A. Antimony
Mr. B. C. Arsenic
Mr. D. E. Selenium
Mr. F. G. Tellurium
Mr. H. I. Iodine
Mr. J. K. Bromine
Mr. L. M. Chlorine
Mr. N. O. Fluorine
Mr. P. R. Oxygen
Mr. Q. S. Nitrogen
Mr. T. U. Carbon
Mr. V. W. Hydrogen
Mr. X. Y. Helium
Mr. Z. A. Neon
Mr. B. C. Argon
Mr. D. E. Krypton
Mr. F. G. Xenon
Mr. H. I. Radon

8 and this leads to a wide range in the use of the apparatus and the ground.

Although there is abroad the idea that only those who see quite a bit are the usual winners in the games and sports there are many of very little vision who win in a way that would make even the seeing proud.

"If by chance" says Mr. Edward E. Allen* "there are any pieces of wood or old wooden posts about, the younger children build houses huts or forts, then pull them down and rebuild in another spot. Such work gives much more pleasure and development of imagination than the swings and fixed playground apparatus." Here of course the blind are not the leaders but they follow and grow mightily in the process.

* Perkins Institution- Annual Report,
1922

the house where I lived, and I
was very happy to see you
and to hear of your success.
I am glad to hear that you
are well and that you are
enjoying your life. I hope
you will continue to be
successful in all your
endeavors. I am sure you
will. I am glad to hear that
you are well and that you
are enjoying your life. I hope
you will continue to be
successful in all your
endeavors. I am sure you
will. I am glad to hear that
you are well and that you
are enjoying your life. I hope
you will continue to be
successful in all your
endeavors. I am sure you
will.

Yours truly,
[Signature]

The keeping of pets and the care of gardens is not playground work but it helps keep the activities of the blind child nearer to those of his seeing brother and he learns to do some things so well that it is hard to believe that he never saw.

If one might include swimming under the playground activities there is an exercise enjoyed by both boys and girls for they are fearless and sometimes become proficient swimmers.

Some schools have more interesting things to investigate than others. Happy and fortunate is the blind child who knows pond, river, truck and flower garden, grove and orchard, poultry house, stable or garage.

(They may imitate the noises and voices that they have heard in a truly remarkable way.)

The child may develop the childhood habit of collecting, if he be fortunate enough to have a seeing "pal" and own just a good mothly collection all labeled by himself for future use.

Those who see the most often bring to the playground in the season of the game, the games of outside boys of their age.

If there are plenty of small poles and flags, drilling is occasionally done.

When the snow and ice comes a group of the boys who know a little about carpentry always try to make sleds. All ages enjoy a good snow ball fight and here is shown the training gained in the ball games which they played in the fall. Sometimes a tottally blind child develops a fairly accurate throw.

Of course the younger members of the group are interested in such races as the three-legged, sack, back to back, and wheel barrow as well as in games such as follow my leader, prisoner's base, leap frog or stilt walking.

In the groups among the older boys one may see some sprinting on the 50 yard running track arranged with two parallel wires breast high fastened to posts at each end. On each wire is a large ring which easily slips over the wire and is used by the runner as his guide; a few feet from the end one sees a low bridge made of string which, hitting the runner in the face reminds him to stop.

There are also the various jumps being tried out such as the standing hing, standing broad, running broad, and the hop, skip,

1845. The following fragments were discovered
by the late Mr. J. H. Stoddard, of New York.
The fragments are of the same material as the
one found at the same place, and are of the same
size and shape. They are all of the same
material, and are all of the same size and shape.
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one found at the same place, and are of the same
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one found at the same place, and are of the same
size and shape. They are all of the same
material, and are all of the same size and shape.

and jump, some schools even use the spring board high jump and the pole vault.

The noises tug-of-war, gives an outlet for pent up energy and wonderful teamwork.

Foot ball and base ball are enjoyed by a few though they must play on smaller places and under different rules.

Almost all of the boys find wrestling to be enjoyable as well as good for muscle strengthening.

The European schools do not appear to have as much out of door play as is done in the United States, but the Royal Normal College in England has developed some most spectacular work among the older students.

Recreative games encourage their initiative power and accustom the children to rapid and energetic action.

To the outside public the children are wonderful in their activity but to those who work with them the really healthy development which so many of them show is the happy and comforting part of it all.

Someone has said that the true spirit of play is one of the essentials of civic progress and instills the spirit of teamwork, loyalty, honesty and fair play.

This spirit is fostered as much as possible in the schools for the blind.

We all agree with Mr. Gregory* when he says that play and physical training make blind children happier, more tractable and easier to govern. They study more work with less friction, are sweeter spirited, and more thoroughly poised in

*"Outlook for the Blind" July 1907

in mind and body. If the blind are to be normal mentally they must first be normal physically and those schools which pay the most attention to physical development now, will show the largest results in the careers of their pupils after leaving schools.

Chapter IV Future Playground Work of Blind.

In Sweden the teachers are taught to teach the children to amuse themselves and it may come in this country though I know of no school where it is done as yet.

In some of the schools for the blind the playground directors are the regular teachers of gymnastics and generally are fully trained for the work, that means the pupils have the regular games, sometimes adapted to suit their particular needs, folk dancing and play.

In other schools just the regular academic teachers take turns in overseeing the play ground, this is not always a satisfactory plan as the

work of the playground is scarcely one for persons of no special training of the work of the teachers may leave the children too much to their own devices and still others are not equal to the venturesome spirit of the children and are apt to insist on too quite games.

Then too the most venturesome invented a certain kind of ball play for stilts, while others persisted in going up stairs.

The totally blind are quite as fond of them as the partially seeing.

The question of playgrounds for the future is a strange one. Some statistics show that the blind are not decreasing in number, but many schools report more pupils of a low mentality than formerly.

If this be true the playground director will need a three sided training: one kind for the totally blind who are mentally deficient, and another for the oversight of those who see and still do not know very much, and a third kind for the children who despite the lack of any or all vision are as wholesome and as full of energy as their seeing brothers. Because they are normal it is not fair to leave them to their own devices in order to care for those who may not be able to develop, for the brightest must be given every advantage to help them compete with their seeing brother.

The public school child rarely has a finely equipped playground with protection from the older children who might be rough, this protection is given by the Physical

Instructor who is always willing to help in the old and suggest new games if necessary.

This the new and most of the old schools for the blind do furnish, some of the blind playgrounds being wonderfully attractive and well equipped.

R. Tait McKenzie* says "that in school the child prepares to live but on the playground he lives. Watch how a child plays and you will know how he will work later." And in order that he may live to his highest and best a director there must be who will strenuously cultivate all that is fair and honest and courageous in the children and see to it that outdoor training aims at rightly used ability and above all honesty, loyalty and teamwork.

"The goal is worth the game for life itself is the goal and 'life is the gift of God.'"

*Exercise in Education and
Medicine. R. Tait McKenzie

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